

organs. How does it come to pass that in autumn the leaves of some of our forest trees exhibit a brilliant livery of crimson, while others exhibit only a yellow or golden glory? Take, for instance, the case of the ash constituents in the dry substance of the leaf. It is known by analysis that the percentage of ash increases through nearly the whole life of the leaf in beech, sycamore, elm, but not in oak, larch, cherry, &c.; it depends a good deal on whether some one ash constituent (generally lime or silica) is being steadily stored up. For example, the dry leaf of *Acer campestre* on May 1 has 6 per cent. ash, and in October 16.2 per cent. ash; the dry leaf of *Prunus avium* has on April 28, 7.8 per cent., and on October 2, 7.2 per cent. ash. Now the leaf of the former tree is only yellow in autumn and never red, while that of the latter is very often beautifully crimson. In the former case there is a kind of gradual decay or death of some of the cells (mostly of the upper epidermis) which occasions a drainage of mineral and organic substances to these parts from the still living tissues. This drainage and accumulation attest, in fact, such a decay; and what is more, they seem to have a distinct influence over the ultimate autumnal coloration of the leaf itself. It is easy to understand, in fact, that the leaves which exhibit such a decay and approach to dissolution are just these wherein the chromogen precursive of the brilliant red coloration would likewise suffer an analogous kind of change, *i.e.* it would tend to become brown, to produce phlobaphene, just as it does in the outer bark which is the practically dead portion of the rind. Where this accumulation of mineral matter and all which it implies does not take place, as in cherries, currants, American oaks, pears, wild vine, barberry, &c., then the chromogen does not deteriorate; it evolves its proper pigment, and assumes the flush and glow of active living colour. On the other hand, in elms, chestnut, linden, birch, poplars, &c., which are never red but only yellow, it is only the vivid carotin attached to the last faded and now exhausted chlorophyll which gleams forth, but only for a time, and if not too much obstructed by the dull browns of decomposed carbohydrates and superoxidised tannic chromogens. P. Q. KEEGAN.

Patterdale, Westmorland.

#### Homochronous Heredity and Changes of Pronunciation.

SEEING that in ancient German, or rather Gothic, Swedish, Danish, probably in French, and possibly in Sardinian, the *th* sound surviving in English (though much less frequent than it used to be) was once largely used, but nowadays Frenchmen and Germans find a difficulty with it, I should like to know whether systematic experiments have been made as to whether children of various ages of these two nationalities can pronounce it more exactly and spontaneously than their compatriots of a maturer age? I should like to make the same inquiry concerning English children and their pronunciation of the gutturals discarded or altered in such words as *night*, *ough* or *laugh*?

CHARLES G. STUART-MENTEATH.

23 Upper Bedford Place, W.C.

*Authorities*:—Helfenstein, "Comparative Grammar of the Teutonic Languages," 1870, pp. 156-9; G. Koerting, "Neugriechisch und Romanisch," 1896, p. 23; W. Meyer-Luebke, "Grammatik der Romanischen Sprachen," 1890, p. 428.

#### The Daylight Meteor of Sunday, September 2.

As Mr. Denning expresses a wish in your issue of September 13 for further information concerning this meteor, I write to inform you of what I saw myself.

I observed the time at which the meteor fell, and made it 6.50, but my watch is no chronometer. I saw the meteor from the road, between Deganwy and Llandudno, and it appeared to fall over the Little Orme's head. If you join this point to Leyburn in Yorkshire, you have the line as near as I can give it, and I do not think it is very far out. I did not note any column of smoke or cloud after the meteor fell. Its path was vertical. Some one says its angle of appearance was 35°, and disappearance 25°, which I should say is about correct. The sun was shining brightly, though low down in the west. The brilliance was greatest just before disappearance. I have never before seen any meteor to compare with it in brightness.

38 Hillfield Road, Hampstead.

T. ROOKE.

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THE meteor of September 2, described in your issue of September 13, was seen in Ireland also, in even brighter daylight.

I noted the time, 6.27 p.m. (Irish), and the direction, E.N.E., from a point near Enniskerry, co. Wicklow. There was a possible error of a couple of minutes in my watch, and a considerable error possible in the estimated direction, which was a rough approximation made without a compass.

B. ST. G. LEFROY.

#### THE THEORY OF IONS.

EVER since Faraday enunciated the law of electrolysis, that the same quantity of electricity passed when chemically equivalent masses of different substances were produced, it has been a matter of speculation whether this may not be due to atomic charges of electricity. Every one, in describing electrolysis and explaining how the substances evolved appeared at the electrodes without any apparent action in between them, based his description and explanation upon the supposition of electric charges on the atoms. Some substances, such as hydrogen, were given positive, and some, such as chlorine, were given negative charges, and the electric current through the liquid was explained as due to the convection of these charges by the moving atoms or groups of atoms, and the movements of these were ascribed to the electric force acting on these charges. The amount of the charge on each atom or group of atoms was proportional to its valency, and as this has with good reason always been taken as a whole number, the charges ascribed to the moving elements were all simple multiples of the charge ascribed to a monovalent atom, such as hydrogen or chlorine. All this has naturally led to the hypothesis that electricity itself is atomic. In electrolysis, at least, there is a certain minimum quantity that corresponds to a single atomic bond, and quantities of electricity transferred by electrolysis are always multiples of this unit. It was surely natural, then, to give a name to this important physical unit quantity of electricity, and it has consequently been called an "electron."

Further, in electrolysis, the electrons always appear connected with, and travelling with, certain atoms or groups of atoms. For example, in copper sulphate solutions, the positive electrons travel in pairs with the divalent copper atoms, and the negative electrons with the divalent atomic group  $SO_4$ . These charged atoms, or groups of atoms, playing such an important part in electrolysis, have been called "ions."

Now there is a very important difference between different liquids in their behaviour when we try to pass an electric current through them. Some are quite easily decomposed, others offer a very great resistance, and it has been a matter of most interesting speculation as to the cause of this. In the first place, most of the easily decomposed liquids are solutions in water, of acids, alkalis or salts, and this has naturally attracted attention. In the second place, these solutions are all ones in which double decompositions, and such-like chemical actions take place with facility. Can a common explanation be given of this remarkable coincidence of electric conductivity and chemical activity? Electric conductivity is due to two causes—first, the electric charges on the ions; and second, the independent mobility of these oppositely charged ions under electric force. Without entering upon the very interesting questions involved in innumerable speculations as to the causes of these charges and of the mobility of the ions, all modern theories acknowledge that, in some way or another, water, and some other liquids in a less degree, have the very remarkable property of conferring upon certain substances dissolved in them the wonderful independent mobility of the ions which we see in electrolysis.